

# Department of Justice High-Risk Metropolitan Area Interoperability Assistance Project *Chicago, Illinois*



## Addressing Interoperability

The Department of Justice (DOJ) Wireless Management Office (WMO) has been working toward improving long-term federal interagency communications across the Nation. As an interim step, and as a response to a request from the House/Senate CJS Appropriations Subcommittee staff, the DOJ WMO has been leading the High-Risk Metropolitan Area Interoperability Assistance Project to provide targeted cities with basic and immediate interagency communications capabilities among local, state, and federal agencies during emergency response. Twenty-five cities were selected by criteria including perceived risk and population size. As stakeholders in 1 of the 25 cities, Chicago metropolitan area local, state, and federal public safety agencies have been working collaboratively with the DOJ WMO to address basic interoperable communications.

## Participating Agencies

Partnership among Chicago area local, state, and federal public safety agencies has been instrumental in the development of comprehensive interoperability solution sets. Participating agencies have included—

- Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF)
- Chicago Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC)
- Cook County Sheriff Police Department
- Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)
- DuPage County Office of Emergency Management
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- Illinois State Police
- Midway Airport
- Northwest Central Dispatch
- Red Center Dispatch
- Southwest Central Dispatch
- O'Hare International Airport
- Orland Park Fire Protection Dispatch
- U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection
- U.S. Department of Energy
- U.S. Marshals Service
- U.S. Navy
- U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS)
- U.S. Secret Service (USSS)

## Key Successes

DOJ and area stakeholders successfully achieved basic interoperability and emergency response communications improvements in the Chicago metropolitan area through the implementation of an interoperability solution. The solution, which leverages existing disparate communications systems, provided new wide-area interoperability capabilities. Additionally, in the course of meeting this project's interoperability goals, local, state, and federal stakeholders were able to foster working relationships to resolve interoperability objectives for the area.

DOJ is installing two channels in the summer of 2006, with each channel equipped with a three site multi-cast 125-watt conventional narrowband very high frequency (VHF) repeater and 15 voted receivers strategically located to provide on-street portable coverage in the Chicago metropolitan area. Hosted and maintained by the FBI, the new interoperability channels will enable federal agencies currently operating with VHF digital narrowband-capable subscriber radios to communicate. Although primarily reserved for communications among command and control personnel during emergency responses, the channels can

also be used for routine operations that involve interagency communications. Following operational guidelines, federal agencies, Chicago OEMC, Cook County Sheriff Police Department, DuPage County OEM, Illinois State Police, Midway Airport Communications Center, Northwest Central Dispatch, O'Hare International Airport Communications Center, Orland Central Dispatch, Red Center Dispatch, and Southwest Central Dispatch, can perform console patches of their talk groups or channels to the interoperability channels.

One key attribute of the channel design is that it allows the participating agencies to communicate using their Project 25 compliant VHF radios in the encrypted mode. Initially, secure communications will take place using the DES-OFB algorithm. As more stringent secure communications requirements are adopted, the local, state, and federal agencies will migrate to the Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) algorithm, which has also been included in the channel design.

To allow federal and local agencies to access the existing VHF statewide mutual-aid channels Point-to-Point (PTP) and Illinois Radio Emergency Assistance Channel (IREACH), radio frequency control station consolettes are being implemented in the summer of 2006 at DEA, FBI, USCG, USPIS, USSS, DuPage County OEM, Northwest Central Dispatch, Southwest Central Dispatch, Orland Central Dispatch, and Red Center Dispatch.

To address management issues regarding the new interoperability channels, DOJ worked with local, state, and federal stakeholders. This collaborative effort resulted in the development of operations guidance documents to address rules of use for operating on the interoperability channels. Stakeholders continue to meet to update documentation and discuss interoperability efforts in the Chicago metropolitan area.

## Moving Forward

The cooperation and support between participating agencies and DOJ WMO provided scalable solutions designed to give local and state agencies future access to the interoperability solution. Sustained operations, maintenance, and support of this interoperability solution will be coordinated by key stakeholders. These efforts, along with stakeholder support, will ensure continuity in addressing interoperable communications among public safety agencies in the Chicago metropolitan area.

## Contact Information

If you would like to know more about this initiative and the interoperability solutions, please contact—

### Interoperability Channels

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